

"The Lord Lifteth up the Meek."

BY J. A. RIDENOUR.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath." There is moral strength in meekness, and it is among the surest evidences of sincerity. It sometimes happens in our Christian experience that we are without help, apparently, human or divine, when enemies combine to crush us, and the dearest friends of earth forsake us, and are willing to believe evil of us, and construe every act of our lives into something wrong. It is then that we need a double portion of the grace of *patience* and *meekness* to enable us not to resent what we regard as such unjust treatment. But with what gratifying results, do we under such trials, watch the first symptoms of returning confidence of those we love, and whose displeasure we have, in some way, unintentionally called down upon us. And how our hearts swell to God, when we feel that through love and patient endurance, we have at last conquered; and those who had turned their backs upon us, once more embrace us as *true* friends. We come out of the struggle with renewed strength. The following beautiful story will serve to illustrate the power of humble meekness in the Christian's life, even under the severest trials we may in the providence of God, be called to pass through.

"A young minister on going to a distant field of labor, had occasion to stop over night with a farmer, a member of a Calvinistic church, an honest man, but unhappily of a peevish, suspicious temper, that had been exasperated by several instances of imposture, in which vagrant men had availed themselves of his hospitality, under the character of Christian ministers. The young preacher had just commenced his ministerial career. His appearance was not prepossessing, and he was depressed with anxieties respecting his untried field of labor.

It was late in the evening when he reached the gate of the farm-yard. The farmer came forth to meet him, but with chilling coldness. He made surly inquiries about his name, whence he came, and whither he was going, etc., expressing meanwhile, by looks, his suspicions; and giving very direct intimations about false pretensions, etc. Weary and depressed as was the stranger, he felt momentary indignation, but repressing it he resolved to copy the meekness of his Master, and, by example, if not otherwise, attempt to curb the perversity of his rustic host. He was pointed to the stable, with permission to feed his horse. As he approached the house he was directed to the kitchen. Some food was spread upon a rude table for him. The hired men in the kitchen whispered to each other their surprise that he was not invited into the parlor. Though of humble origin himself, he felt keenly the indignity of his treatment; his heart for a moment revolted, and he arose to resume his journey with the prospect of a rainy night; but he suddenly checked his feelings and looking toward God, resolved to await patiently the result of this strange scene. It was not long before all were called into another room for family prayers. The preacher followed the hired laborers and took his seat in a corner. The farmer read a chapter in the Bible. At the end of it he was evidently embarrassed, by an inward struggle, not knowing what to do; and, finally turning to the preacher, he abruptly asked him to pray. They knelt down and the young man oppressed with feelings which prayer could best relieve, poured out his soul and tears before God. A divine influence came down on all present; they sobbed around him. The meek pathos of his tones, the spirituality of his sentiments, the evangelical views involved in the prayer, and its prevailing earnestness struck all present. The morose farmer subdued and melted approached him at the conclusion of the prayer, and, in the presence of the family, and with flowing tears, begged his pardon.

"I should not have been so suspicious," he said, "but I have been all day under a strong temptation of the adversary—my mind has been irritable—my conduct toward you to-night is a mystery to myself—I cannot account for it even by the state of my mind during the day. I have not been myself or I would not have so treated you. Forgive me,

sir. How have you been able to endure it?"

"My Lord," replied the youthful preacher, "has said learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. It is my ambition to do so. Try, my brother, to learn the same lesson." It was the keenest rebuke that could be given to the farmer; he felt its pertinency, made the humblest acknowledgements, and begged his maltreated guest to tarry at the house several days, and preach for the family and the neighbors. His engagements would not allow him to remain so long, but such was the importunity of his host, that he consented to preach the next day. That night he reposed in the best chamber of the house and his rest was sweetened by the thought that he had conquered a perverse mind by an example of meekness."

Dear readers if we have been hasty in condemning our brethren, and have turned our backs upon them, and perhaps, have *spoken* or *written* words to them, that have burned into the soul so deeply that time will hardly ever remove them, we should remember that the law of kindness has been forgotten, and do what we can to atone for the wrong.

"If we err in human blindness,  
And forget that we are dust,  
If we miss the law of kindness,  
When we struggle to be just,  
Snowy wings of love shall cover  
All the faults that hide away.  
When the weary watch is over  
And the mists have cleared away  
We shall know each other better,  
When the mists have cleared away.

Down in the human heart  
Crushed by the tempter,  
Feelings lie buried,  
That grace can restore,  
Touched by a loving heart,  
Waken by kindness,  
Chords that were broken  
Will vibrate once more."

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The Difficulties of the Bible.

It is said the Bible is not a plain book, and is therefore far from perfect. It contains so much that is difficult and dark, that it is difficult to think of it as in any sense the revelation of a God who is anxious to disclose to us even spiritual truth. It may be said in reply, that if the Bible did not contain difficulties it would not be true, and would not resemble the other works of God. What did Peter say of the epistles of Paul, with which he, like us, had wrestled sometimes in vain? In them, he says, "are some things hard to understand, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest," that is, distort, pervert from their real meaning, "as they do the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction." There should be comfort in this passage to many of us. Remembering how Paul's involved sentences, his prolonged and difficult arguments, and his frequent parentheses, diverting the channel of his thought, have worried and perplexed us, there is an innocent though half-mischievous pleasure in thinking that Peter was worried in the same way. His ardent, undisciplined mind, even when divinely illumined, could not see quite through all which his beloved brother had written. Paul had long been a sort of stumbling-block to him, and he acknowledged that some things in his epistles are hard to be understood. But only the ignorant and vacillating, he adds in effect, would pervert these difficulties and lose their souls on account of them. Other Scriptures as well as Paul's are difficult, and the Bible warns its readers not to destroy themselves against these stones of offense.

It is sad to remember how often this warning is unheeded. Many have made shipwreck of their faith by steering their craft against every rock on the coast of this ocean of truth. Wise navigators prefer a safe channel, an open sea; but restless, impracticable, and willful minds often covet a dangerous shore. They go through the Bible, not like a traveler who keeps the safe highway, but like wayward children who climb over the rocks and sport along the stony hedges until, footsore and bleeding, they ask, "Is this the way of life?" The wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err, if he seek from this Book chiefly a safe, practical direction in the path of duty; but the wayfaring man may be a prodigy of learning and metaphysical acuteness, and wander afar off from

the truth, if he is seeking chiefly to solve all difficulties and explore the heart of every mystery.

Let it be understood, then, that this word of God is not a field all blazing with sunlight. Clouds hover over it, for even with this Book in our hands the apostle tells us "we know in part." Shadows fall on its pages—the shadows of the Infinite. It is impossible that we should comprehend God. We may apprehend him—that is, lay hold of his nature, touch the shining hem of his garment blazing with stars, and press the soft hand of his grace; but who shall grasp the fullness, or measure the altitude of his being, and comprehend the circumference of his truth?

An easy Bible, one having no mystery and no difficulty, might please for a time, but it would soon be exhausted, and soon would fail to lure and lift the soul toward the heavenly heights. It would not be like God.

It has become an accepted principle in the best modern art, largely through the teaching of Ruskin, that in order to attain to sublimity of style in representations of natural scenery, there must always be an element of mystery; a sense that all has not been said and cannot be said; an entrancing suggestion of greater things beyond the magic of the painter's pencil to express. Nature is not a great crystal, with light dancing in every atom. She is a boundless sea, over which the sunbeams and the shadows tremble with alternating pulse, while vague horizons allure the imagination into dreams of eternity. And our precious word has on it the same stamp of divinity. It is open and full of light. It is also vast and full of mystery. Those who study it longest are like the naturalists, who, as they sharpen their vision and look with microscopic insight into the simplest objects of the material world, discover new realms ever revealing themselves in that which seemed so familiar as to be common.

An old saint, once the pastor of Abraham Lincoln, said to me, "I have been studying the Gospel of John for fifty years, but it keeps ahead of me all the time." When unbelief assaults this book with the spear called difficulty, faith wrests the spear from the enemy's hand and turns it into a weapon of defense. A Bible which is without that which is hard to understand might be the production of man alone. But again—and I speak now from painful experience as a believer—how many of our troubles about God's word are the revelations of our conceit and moral crudeness. We approach Scriptures with fancies furnished by our reading and speculation, and comparing these with God's word, they did not fully agree. We were distressed and could not read some parts of the divine revelation with any comfort and satisfaction. It seemed to us that we included the Bible and more too; but later in our lives we discovered that the Bible included us and much besides.

It recognized our truth and other truths equally important which our one-sidedness did not grasp. Many a child has the same experience with its mother. It sees one thing and craves that, and thinks it is the only thing needful, and is angry that the mother does not altogether sympathize with this state of mind. But years later the child, grown to manhood, realizes how much broader was the maternal wisdom than his own; and thus we come to reverence what once only fretted us.

Said Frederick D. Maurice, "I cannot understand the difficulties of the Bible, but they help me to understand myself." So many of us have gained the preciousness of self-knowledge in the twilight of things hard to be understood. We have learned humility as Job did after he had been confounded by the sublime mysteries of creation. We have learned self-distrust as Peter did after he had doubted the word which his own sin verified. We have learned to seek for divine illumination through prayer, as multitudes in every Christian generation have done, who studying God's word as the blessed Fra. Angelica painted his pictures—on bended knees—have seen the mists removed, or rather, glorified, even as the telescope of the astronomer resolves the hazy nebulae of the Milky Way into shining stars, eternal and supreme.—J. H. BARROWS.